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Virgil and the Elegiac Sensibility¹

E. J. KENNEY

It would, I imagine, be generally agreed that any respectable anthology of Latin love poetry should include Virgil's second and eighth *Eclogues* — and probably also the tenth. Critics have constantly emphasized the elegiac character of these poems; and as early as the first century A.D. we find it taken for granted that Corydon in *Eclogue* 2 was Virgil himself. In the naively biographical form in which the ancient sources moot the idea it is obviously untenable;² but it is difficult not to sympathize with (for instance) Karl Büchner's intuition that the poem is "ein Symbol seiner Seele"³ — that it reflects in an immediate way the poet's own experience of thwarted love. In this study I propose to touch on the already complex picture of what we know or can infer about the process of literary creation that issued in these apparently very personal poems. I will, as it were, take as my text some words of my friend and colleague Mr. Robert Coleman, who ends an eminently judicious note on the ancient biographical explanations of the second *Eclogue* with this sentence: "Whatever views we take of the poem's genesis do not affect our appreciation of it as a literary creation, in which Vergil's originality has blended a number of traditional elements to form a truly elegiac pastoral."⁴ The same remark, *mutatis mutandis*, would apply with equal force to the eighth *Eclogue*; and with it in mind I want to try to tease out, so to say, one strand of the literary web which has a particular

¹A lecture intended to be delivered (*dis aliter visum*) in the University of Leeds on 2 March 1982 as part of a commemoration of the two-thousandth anniversary of the death of Virgil.

²See R. Coleman, ed., *Vergil Eclogues* (Cambridge 1977), pp. 108-109.

³K. Büchner, *P. Vergilius Maro, der Dichter der Römer* (Stuttgart 1957), p. 170 = *RE* VIII A, col. 1190.

⁴Coleman (above, note 2), p. 109.

bearing on the elegiac characteristics of the two poems.

This is learned poetry, derivative and obliquely allusive. That was the tradition which Virgil inherited and espoused. Originality was a function of choice from and variations upon existing models. What cannot be predicted is where the choice might fall: *which* particular incident or theme in earlier poetry was likely to appeal to the later poet, to set his imagination to work in its turn. In the context of the present discussion the question suggests itself in connection above all with Cornelius Gallus, the progenitor of Roman love-elegy, friend of Virgil, first favored and then disgraced by Augustus, whose surviving works were, until 1979, comprised in a single pentameter. In that year was published the now famous papyrus from Qaşr Ibrîm which increased the corpus some tenfold.⁵ It cannot in my view be maintained that we now know very much more than we did about Gallus' poetry — at least about the sort of things we (perhaps I should say I) most want to know. We do have a lot more questions. For a sense of what Gallus meant to Virgil in particular we must still fall back on the indirect evidence of the sixth and tenth *Eclogues*. On the basis of that evidence the conclusion that I draw is that it was not so much the quality of Gallus' poetry that caught the fancy of his contemporaries and (albeit, one suspects, largely at second hand) his successors, as his role in mediating certain Alexandrian motifs. In that sense a line like the pentameter that I have mentioned,

uno tellures diuidit amne duas,⁶

with its laboriously contrived structure reflecting the topographical content, may be more representative of Gallus' importance than the new fragment. But the arsenals of divine vengeance — in this case the rubbish-heaps of ancient Egypt — are still in business and may yet confute me.

The particular motif from which this train of thought arises is found in the tenth *Eclogue*, where Gallus, dying of unrequited love, is made to say that he is resolved to withdraw to the woods and suffer as best he may, carving the name of Lycoris on the young trees:

certum est in siluis inter spelaea ferarum
malle pati tenerisque meos incidere amores
arboribus: crescent illae, crescetis, amores. (*Ecl.* 10. 52-54)

⁵R. D. Anderson, P. J. Parsons, R. G. M. Nisbet, "Elegiacs by Gallus from Qaşr Ibrîm," *Journal of Roman Studies* 69 (1979), pp. 125-55.

⁶*Fragmenta Poetarum Latinorum*, p. 99 Morel. Cf. D. O. Ross, *Backgrounds to Augustan poetry: Gallus, elegy and Rome* (Cambridge 1975), p. 39.

The motif of carving the name of the beloved on the trees is found in one of Theocritus' non-pastoral *Idylls* (18. 47-8) and in Hellenistic epigram (Glaucus, *A.P.* IX. 341 = 1819-24 G.-P., anon. 12, 130 = 3762-67). But Virgil's application of the idea is associated with another notion, that of the hapless lover retiring to the wilderness to nurse his sorrow: and in this form the source of the motif can be quite specifically identified. It is found in Callimachus' *Aetia*, in his story of the love of Acontius and Cydippe; and it is on what Callimachus may have contributed to these elegiac *Eclogues* that I principally want to enlarge here.

Wendell Clausen, in his classic paper, "Callimachus and Latin poetry," has drawn attention to Virgil's use of the word *tenuis* (slight, slender), which is applied to poetry at the beginning of the first and, even more significantly, the sixth *Eclogues*. The word, which renders the Greek λεπτός or λεπταλέος, a Callimachean term, constitutes an oblique but unmistakable assertion that "his pastoral poetry... is Callimachean in character."⁷ Clausen indeed suggests that Virgil was the most Callimachean of all Roman poets, that he "was the only Roman poet who ever read the *Aetia* all the way through."⁸ I am here to talk about Virgil, not to defend the honor of Ovid, so I pass the implicit challenge by. Whether or not Virgil had read the whole of Callimachus' highly-wrought and erudite poem, his exploitation of this episode, the story of Acontius and Cydippe, was selective; and so was that of the other poets to whose use of it we can point, Propertius and Ovid. What is of interest is *what* they selected and *how* they proceeded to use it.

For those who are not familiar with the story a summary will be helpful.

Acontius, a beautiful youth from Ceos, fell in love with the equally beautiful Cydippe of Naxos on seeing her at a festival in Delos. He threw in the way of her nurse an apple [quince?] on which he had written 'I swear by Artemis to marry Acontius'. The nurse picked it up and, being illiterate, asked Cydippe to read the inscription, which she did — aloud. She kept the episode to herself and returned to Naxos and to the marriage that her father had already arranged for her. Meanwhile Acontius had betaken himself into the countryside to be alone with his great love and to carve the name of his beloved on the trees. In Naxos a day was three times arranged for Cydippe's

⁷W. Clausen, "Callimachus and Latin poetry," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 5 (1964), p. 194. Cf. E. A. Schmidt, *Poetische Reflexionen. Vergils Bukolik* (München 1972), pp. 19-32.

⁸Clausen (above, note 7), p. 187.

marriage, and three times she mysteriously fell ill so that the wedding could not take place. The fourth time her father went to Delphi and consulted Apollo, who disclosed the girl's involuntary oath and advised its fulfilment. So Acontius and Cydippe were married, and Callimachus' version of the story concluded with the genealogical *aetion* [explanation of origin] which we must take it was the *raison d'être* of the story so far as its inclusion in his poem was concerned.⁹

We have extensive fragments of Callimachus' text, and the gaps can be filled with some approximation to reliability from the Greek prose version of the fifth-century epistolographer Aristaenetus. Unfortunately, for the portion which now concerns us, the description of Acontius' *Waldeinsamkeit* and the expostulatory monologue which he delivered to the trees, we are almost wholly dependent on Aristaenetus. Here Ovid is no help; he treated the story elaborately in his *Heroides* (20 and 21), but made no direct use of this episode, partly because it was not germane to his own approach, but also possibly because it had already been exploited by Gallus, as the tenth *Eclogue* clearly shows, by Propertius, and, as I shall argue, by Virgil.

I alluded to the *combination* of ideas in Callimachus. This, though it cannot be proved, is likely to have been due to him. He may indeed have drawn on an elegy by his contemporary Phanocles, his "Ἐρωτες ἢ καλοῖ," "Loves or beautiful boys." We have a substantial fragment of this poem, which begins with three couplets describing how Orpheus sang of his love for Calais "in the shady woods," σκιεροῖσιν ἐν ἄλσεσιν.¹⁰ Though Orpheus in this description suffers sleepless pain, there is no suggestion in Phanocles' text of ideas of withdrawal or solitude; if they were implied, Callimachus made them explicit. Certainly they are prominent in Propertius' exploitation of the passage, his elegy I. 18. Propertius' indebtedness to Callimachus in this poem is beyond question and has been well analyzed by Francis Cairns, who emphasizes "the wild and solitary circumstances of his utterance."¹¹ Propertius no doubt drew on Gallus' adaptation as well, as argued by David Ross¹² — a reminder of the interlocking character of this poetical tradition. As Cairns and other commentators have noted, Propertius transformed his originals by imparting a strongly forensic tone to his lover's soliloquy, turning it into "a speech for the defence." That kind of bid for

⁹E. J. Kenney, "Law and legalism: Ovid, *Heroides* 20 and 21," *Arion* 9 (1970), pp. 390-91.

¹⁰See Phanocles fr. I. 1-6 Powell.

¹¹F. Cairns, "Propertius i. 18 and Callimachus, *Acontius and Cydippe*," *Classical Review* n.s. 19 (1969), p. 133.

¹²Ross (above, note 6), pp. 73-74.

originality was the poet's prerogative; what Virgil made of it was different again — and wholly Virgilian.

Love as a theme of the *Eclogues* makes its first real appearance in the first word of the first line of the second *Eclogue* and does so in striking, almost defiant, guise: *formosum* — a beautiful *male*. The next word, in the nominative case, reveals that the lover of the *formosus* is not a woman: *formosum pastor* — a (male) shepherd. So far as sense goes the rest of the line is expendable: we already know the plot. But the last word in the line, the name of the *formosus*, sets the tone for what follows: Alexis belongs to the elegiac rather than the pastoral tradition.¹³ Conington's remarks on all this have been much quoted and as often derided: "We should be glad, with Ribbeck, to believe it to be purely imaginary, though even then it is sufficiently degrading to Virgil."¹⁴ But those who, like H. J. Rose, vigorously denounce Conington for (in effect) having been born when he was, are apt to overlook that there is a real problem here, though it is of a literary-historical rather than a moral or biographical order.¹⁵ In the genesis of Roman elegy an important part was played by Hellenistic erotic epigram; and Callimachus had imparted to the genre a strongly homosexual cast. This element the Roman elegists tended to ignore or play down. Catullus was not and is not remembered for the handful of Juventius-poems; and Tibullus (it is an interesting experiment) incorporated his Marathus in a triangle with the poet-lover and the girl Pholoe. Virgil's Corydon is in fact bisexual; and the same might be said, in a different sense, of Callimachus' Acontius. In his treatment of the story, Acontius starts out as *formosus*, καλός, a beautiful boy courted by youths and men. When he falls in love with the beautiful, inaccessible and much sought-after Cydippe he experiences a total bouleversement of his existence — now *he* knows what it is like to be, as it were, on the receiving end, to be in love and have no hope.¹⁶ In any Greek society in which the courting of boys by older males, as documented by Sir Kenneth Dover, was part of the normal social pattern, such reversals were no doubt recurrent dramas of everyday life. We find the idea indeed exploited in an epigram by Meleager (*A.P.* XII. 109 = 4308-11

¹³Cf. Meleager, *A.P.* XII. 127 = 4420-27 G.-P.; Coleman (above, note 2), *ad loc.*; J. van Sickle, *The design of Virgil's Bucolics* (Rome 1978), p. 125, n. 61.

¹⁴J. Conington-H. Nettleship, ed., *The works of Virgil I. Eclogues and Georgics*, 5th ed. rev. F. Haverfield (London 1898), p. 35.

¹⁵H. J. Rose, *The Eclogues of Vergil* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1942), p. 26. Cf. G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford 1968), p. 304: "It is easier to see that [Conington's] is an absurd remark than to explain why Virgil made the change."

¹⁶Callim. fr. 68, 69 Pf.; Aristaen. I. 10. 7-17 M.

G.-P.), more allusively by Theocritus (*Id.* 7. 117 ff.), and we may perhaps catch a passing whiff of it at the end of Horace's "Soluitur acris hiems." It is here that the apparently decorative detail of the carving of Cydippe's name on the trees becomes significant. Acontius must have been used to seeing his own name written up on walls (this habit is documented, if documentation is needed, by Dover¹⁷): Ἀκόντιος καλός, "Acontius is fair." Now, suddenly, it is he who is doing the writing, and the name is a girl's: Κυδίππη καλή.¹⁸ The change of gender in the Greek makes a point that Callimachus' readers were better attuned to take than we are; for women were not as a rule the subject of such inscriptions, unless they were no better than they should be — and in that case the message was more likely than not to be abusive.¹⁹

That Virgil did indeed have the Acontius-story in mind when he wrote the second *Eclogue* is by no means a new suggestion; it has already been argued by (e.g.) Professor La Penna and Mr. Ian DuQuesnay.²⁰ The idea is not taken up by Mr. Coleman in his commentary, but to my mind it is rendered overwhelmingly probable by consideration of the first five verses of the poem:

formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexin,
delicias domini, nec quid speraret habebat.
tantum inter densas, umbrosa cacumina, fagos
adsidue ueniebat. ibi haec incondita solus
montibus et siluis studio iactabat inani. (*Ecl.* 2. 1-5)

The setting is precisely that of Acontius' outburst, and there is one detail which may come directly from Callimachus: the beeches. In the fifth *Eclogue* Mopsus inscribes his song in the green bark of a beech, *in uiridi... cortice fagi* (5. 13). Furthermore the trees to which Propertius appeals as witnesses and in whose bark he writes the name of Cynthia are specified as beeches and pines, *fagus et Arcadio pinus amica deo* (I. 18. 20). Now Aristaenetus, on whom as I have said we are here dependent, makes Acontius utter his lament sitting under the oaks or the

¹⁷K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978), pp. 111-24.

¹⁸Callim. fr. 73 Pf.

¹⁹Dover (above, note 17), pp. 113-14; D. M. Robinson and E. J. Fluck, *A Study of the Greek love-names* (Baltimore 1937), pp. 1-2, 10-11; Beazley, *Attic red-figure vase-painters* (2nd ed., Oxford 1963) II, pp. 1559-1616; *Attic black-figure vase-painters* (Oxford 1956), pp. 676-78.

²⁰A. La Penna, "La seconda Ecloga e la poesia bucolica di Virgilio," *Maia* 15 (1963), p. 488; I. M. Le M. DuQuesnay, "From Polyphemus to Corydon," in D. West and T. Woodman, edd., *Creative imitation and Latin literature* (Cambridge 1979), p. 48 and nn. 127, 131.

poplars, *φηγοῖς ὑποκαθήμενος ἢ πελέαις*.²¹ It is a fair guess, as Cairns and Ross have suggested,²² that Virgil's *fagi* were borrowed from Callimachus' *φηγοί*, whether by Virgil himself or Gallus. We are not bound to believe that the two poets, or their successors, were unaware that *fagus* is not an accurate rendering of *φηγός*, which is a quite different tree. Deliberate mistakes of this kind themselves might count as erudition.²³ What mattered in this case was the Callimachean *sound* of the word in the context. Having used *fagus* in *Eclogue* 2, the earliest of the collection, for these specifically Callimachean associations, Virgil went on to make it a regular feature of the pastoral décor;²⁴ and it may be more than coincidental that in the collection as arranged for publication the word makes its first appearance in the first line of the first poem — followed closely by the programmatic word *tenuis*:

Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi
siluestrem tenui Musam meditaris auena. (*Ecl.* 1. 1-2)

The manner in which Virgil turns the Callimachean Acontius to account is interestingly economical. In effect he dichotomizes him. As *καλός*, *formosus*, *puer delicatus*, Acontius becomes Alexis; as disconsolate lover he becomes Corydon — the character into which Virgil is thought to have projected himself. Corydon's role as pursuer is also taken over from Callimachus, from the unnamed pursuers of Acontius. The detail of v. 12 *tua dum uestigia lustrō* is evidently lifted from that source, for we read in Aristaenetus that many of Acontius' lovers in

²¹Aristaen. I. 10. 57 M.

²²Cairns (above, note 11), p. 133, Ross (above, note 6), p. 72. This is a simpler and more plausible explanation than that suggested by Williams (above, note 15), p. 318: that Virgil was led to adopt the *φηγός* because he was taken with the simile at Theoc. *Id.* 12. 8-9, where its shade symbolizes the beloved. However, the suggestion (DuQuesnay [above, note 20], p. 40) that he meant his *fagi* to be thought of as oaks rather than beeches strikes me as implausible.

²³Another case of what might be called learned catachresis is the famous crux at *Ecl.* 8. 58 *omnia uel medium fiat mare*. The idea that Virgil misunderstood *πάντα δ' ἑραλλὰ γένοιτο* at Theoc. *Id.* 1. 134 is rightly scouted by most commentators (the error, if he could have committed it, would not have survived the revision in the light of readings to friends which must have preceded the collected edition of the poems); but he cannot have expected the apparent echo to pass unnoticed. It must have been intended as an allusive claim to the poet's right to innovate — but almost always on the basis of an existing model. So with *φηγός-fagus*. An analogous case is Catullus' use of *lepidus* to suggest *λεπτός*.

²⁴Cf. Ross (above, note 6), p. 72: "the *fagus* is, beyond all others perhaps, the tree of the Eclogues."

the violence of their passion fitted their feet into his footsteps.²⁵ This characterization is imposed on the *dramatis personae* that Virgil took over from his main source, the eleventh *Idyll* of Theocritus. The clownish Cyclops becomes Acontius-Corydon, Galatea becomes Acontius-Alexis. These transformations are part of a general complication and enrichment of the Theocritean original. In that simple plot Virgil has incorporated most of the standard ingredients of love-elegy as we know them from Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid: separation, the rich rival, the heartless beloved, love as infatuation, the lover as a figure of suffering. It is a complete transposition of the elegiac situation into the pastoral mode. What is individual to Virgil and what makes the poem effective and moving is his manner of developing the same hint in Callimachus that Propertius also seized on: the sense of the lover's *isolation*. In Callimachus (Aristaenetus) Acontius appeals to the trees: "Do *you* feel this passion? Does the cypress feel love for the pine? No, I do not believe it; for in that case you would not simply shed your leaves in your grief, but the sickness of love would burn you right down to trunk and roots."²⁶ This idea of alienation Virgil carried even further and did so in an extraordinarily powerful way. In him Corydon seems to stand, as it were, outside nature; as he sings time, for him, stands still, while for the rest of the world the eternal rhythm of life goes on regardless of his suffering. The six verses in which this feeling is conveyed are among the most poignant and haunting in all Latin literature:

nunc etiam pecudes umbras et frigora captant,
 nunc uiridis etiam occultant spineta lacertos,
 Thestylis et rapido fessis messoribus aestu
 alia serpyllumque herbas contundit olentis.
 at mecum raucis, tua dum uestigia lustrō,
 sole sub ardenti resonant arbusta cicadis. (*Ecl.* 2. 8-13)

The final detail of the relentless, endless shrilling of the cicadas somehow crystallizes the vast impersonal indifference of nature towards individual human anguish. It is in the timeless suspense created by this description that Corydon's whole complaint, with as its centre his idealized vision of life in the countryside with the beloved, is uttered; until at the end of the poem he awakes to the realization that it is sunset, that time has not really stood still, and that outside the temporary refuge of his self-pitying fantasies the rhythms of the actual world, in which after all he must seek the solution of his troubles, have gone inexorably on. The tension between that reality and Corydon's wistful

²⁵Aristaen. I. 10. 13-14 M. Cf. Meleager, *A.P.* XII. 84. 5 = 4606 G.-P.

²⁶Aristaen. I. 10. 74-79 M.

dreaming "in quest of an elusive world of innocence"²⁷ — this tension is what informs the poem. It is not finally resolved; the ending, like that of *Miser Catulle*, remains ambiguous and ironical.²⁸ More than one critic has noted the touches of humor in all this; but in the *Eclogue's* pathos tinged now and then with absurdity (as Mr. Coleman puts it),²⁹ we have come a long way from the simple comedy of Theocritus' rustic Cyclops.

In the eighth *Eclogue*³⁰ Virgil combines and adapts ideas from several of Theocritus' *Idylls*, most notably the second, the *Pharmaceutriae*, which provides the material for the second of the two corresponding songs, that of Alpheisiboeus. One feature of his treatment is at first sight puzzling: admirers of Theocritus' powerful poem are apt to wonder why Virgil has apparently left out the best part of it — why Simaetha's narrative of her love for Delphis has been allowed to disappear, leaving only the magic sequence. In fact of course the missing part has been turned to account elsewhere. In the centre of the magic ritual stands the singer's prayer:

talis amor Daphnin qualis cum fessa iuuen-
per nemora atque altos quaerendo bucula lucos
propter aquae riuum uiridi procumbit in ulua
perdita, nec serae meminit decedere nocti,
talis amor teneat, nec sit mihi cura mederi. (*Ecl.* 8. 85-89)

This wonderful Lucretian simile, as Mr. Coleman notes, reveals the speaker's true feelings: "The wistful longing and the weariness of the searcher belong to *her*."³¹ The picture of *spatially* distant yearning which is the centrepiece of the second song corresponds both formally and thematically to the *temporally* distant picture which stands in the centre of the first song in the *Eclogue*, that of Damon.

²⁷Eleanor W. Leach, *Vergil's Eclogues. Landscapes of experience* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1974), p. 150. It is the same world as that yearned for by Gallus at *Ecl.* 10. 35-41; Leach, p. 159 and n. 22. On the innocence of the pastoral landscape cf. A. Parry, "Landscape in Greek poetry," *Yale Classical Studies* 15 (1957), p. 10.

²⁸A point rightly emphasized by E. A. Schmidt, "Review of Sebastian Posch, *Beobachtungen zur Theokritnachwirkung bei Vergil*," *Gnomon* 44 (1972), p. 775, with earlier literature; cf. DuQuesnay (above, note 20), pp. 58-59.

²⁹Coleman (above, note 2), p. 253. For a discussion of the *Eclogue* in which full justice is done to Virgil's handling of his models see DuQuesnay (above, note 20).

³⁰See A. Richter, ed., *Virgile: la huitième Bucolique* (Paris 1970).

³¹Coleman (above, note 2), p. 249 (my italics). There is also a distant echo of Acontius-Corydon in the idea of a hopeless search for the beloved "per nemora atque altos... lucos"; cf. above, note 25.

This song is a tirade against the perfidy of a girl called Nysa — a typically elegiac theme. Once again the setting is the woods, which form a frame to the song, being referred to or addressed at its beginning (vv. 22-24) and at its end (v. 58). As in Callimachus (Aristaenetus), as in the picture of Gallus in the tenth *Eclogue* (10. 8), and as in Propertius (I. 18), the trees are figured as an audience likely to be in sympathy with the singer's appeal:

Maenalus argutumque nemus pinusque loquentis
semper habet, semper pastorum ille audit amores
Panaque, qui primus calamos non passus inertis. (*Ecl.* 8. 22-4)

This is in contrast to the opening of the second *Eclogue*, the implication of which is that Corydon's words are *unheeded* by the woods and hills:

ibi haec incondita solus
montibus et siluis studio iactabat inani. (*Ecl.* 2. 4-5)

The heart of Damon's song, corresponding to the simile of the heifer at vv. 85-89, is the scene in the orchard:

saepibus in nostris paruam te roscida mala —
dux ego uester eram — uidi cum matre legentem.
alter ab undecimo tum me iam acceperat annus,
iam fragilis poteram a terra contingere ramos.
ut uidi, ut perii, ut me malus abstulit error! (*Ecl.* 8. 37-41)

The passage has charmed many readers, including Voltaire and Macaulay;³² perhaps nowhere else in all literature has there been captured in so brief a compass so perfect an evocation of the haunting idea of the lost paradise of childhood — the image so movingly explored by (to mention only one example) Alain Fournier in *Le grand Meaulnes*. As with Fournier, so in Virgil the data have been artfully manipulated. Of the personal experience which engendered Fournier's novel we know a good deal; of Virgil's life we really know very little. What we can document is the treatment of his poetic originals. The broad outlines of the picture are drawn from Theocritus' eleventh *Idyll*, the chief source for *Eclogue* 2, where the Cyclops recalls how he first saw Galatea:

ἡράσθην μὲν ἔγωγε τεοῦς, κόρα, ἀνίκα πρᾶτον
ἦνθες ἐμᾶ σὺν ματρὶ θέλοισ' ὑακίνθινα φύλλα
ἐξ ὄρεος δρέψασθαι, ἐγὼ δ' ὁδὸν ἀγεμόνονον.

(*Id.* 11. 25-27)

To this Virgil has added Simaetha's recollection of the first time she saw Delphis — what critics resort to French to describe, the *coup de*

³²T. Pinney, ed., *The letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay* III (London 1976), p. 62 and n. 4; cf. D. Knowles, *Lord Macaulay 1800-1859* (Cambridge 1960), pp. 26-27.

foudre:

χὼς ἴδον, ὥς ἐμάνη, ὥς μοι πυρὶ θυμὸς ἰάφθη.

(*Id.* 2. 82)

But the *malus error* in Virgil's adaptation seems to owe something also to the description of Atalanta's love for Hippomenes in the third *Idyll*:

ὥς ἴδεν, ὥς ἐμάνη, ὥς ἐς βαθὺν ἄλατ' ἔρωτα.

(*Id.* 3. 42)

The rationale of Virgil's dealings with his originals begins to emerge. If, as suggested by Mr. Coleman, his intention in this *Eclogue* was "to demonstrate that in the face of love's disappointments... success comes not to the gentle and plaintive but to the bold and resourceful,"³³ the passionate retrospection of Simaetha's soliloquy must be transferred to the song in which the failure of the "gentle and plaintive" lover is depicted. This — the essential rightness and the pathetic effect of the idea in its transferred setting — is no doubt the weightiest reason for Virgil's manner of proceeding. But it is possible that other considerations also influenced him.

There is one feature of the love-story of Nysa and her rejected lover that continues to exercise the commentators and for which, so far as I know, no really convincing explanation has been adduced.³⁴ Nysa is not merely unfaithful in the conventional elegiac sense that she has abandoned her lover for another. She had evidently been formally betrothed to him and is now about to be *married* to Mopsus. The singer's reference to the gods, taken by itself, is inexplicit:

coniugis indigno Nysae deceptus amore
dum queror et diuos, quamquam nil testibus illis
profeci, extrema moriens tamen adloquor hora. (*Ecl.* 8. 18-20)

Virgil, however, must have intended his readers to notice that this is based on a passage in Catullus' *Peleus and Thetis*:

non tamen ante mihi languescent lumina morte,
nec prius a fesso secedent corpore sensus,
quam iustam a diuis exposcam prodita multam
caelestumque fidem postrema comprecser hora. (64. 188-91)

This comes in Ariadne's famous complaint of the treachery of Theseus — a complaint of desertion *by a husband*. The oath referred to by the singer was one taken by Nysa to *marry* him. All this is quite out of character in the world of Roman elegy, in which betrothal and marriage

³³Coleman (above, note 2), p. 255.

³⁴Cf. Richter (above, note 30), pp. 29-32, 44-46, 138-40.

do not belong.³⁵ Words like *uir* and *coniunx* or *coniugium* are used on occasion with calculated ambiguity of the elegiac relationship, but that is different. What we have here is generically incongruous. The difficulty is not met by styling Nysa "an 'Arcadian' wife"³⁶ — whatever exactly that means. Nowhere else in the *Eclogues* or in Roman love-elegy is there any real analogy for this variant of the jilted lover theme. But there *is* an exactly parallel situation, as we have seen, in Callimachus: his Acontius and Cydippe. Cydippe had actually sworn — albeit unwittingly and unwillingly — to marry Acontius, and she was then betrothed to another man. This looks like the "plot" which was in Virgil's mind when he composed Damon's song.

If so, other parts of the pattern fall into place with a neatness which would be curious if it were altogether accidental.

(1) As we have already noted, Virgil took the general idea of *Ecl.* 8. 37-41 from Theocritus' *Idyll* 11. There it was hyacinths that Galatea was picking; Virgil has changed them to apples. The erotic symbolism of the apple is familiar, and may be seen here as "a promise of amatory experience,"³⁷ a hint of what was to come; but it is difficult not to be reminded of the role of the apple (or quince: in Greek and Latin the same word may serve) in Acontius' strategem — a role in that story too symbolic as well as practical.

(2) Damon begins and ends his song (vv. 20, 60) with a threat of suicide. This is borrowed from Theocritus (3. 25-27; cf. 3. 42, quoted above); but as in other instances the borrowing takes on additional resonance from (if it was not suggested by) Callimachus, in whom (Aristaenetus) Acontius, on first seeing Cydippe, declared that for him it was now marriage or death, ἢ γάμον ἢ θάνατον.³⁸

(3) The motif of overwhelming love at first sight — the *coup de foudre* — was of course familiar in the literary tradition. One thinks of Medea's first sight of Jason in Apollonius' *Argonautica*; and, as we have noted, it was prominent in the Theocritean original(s) of *Ecl.* 8. 37-41. It was also prominent in the Callimachean story: Aristaenetus enlarges on both the violence of the wound dealt by Love to Acontius and also

³⁵The closest parallel adduced by Richter (above, note 30) is Diosc. *A.P.* V. 52 = 1491-96 G.-P. In Roman elegy the notion of marriage is always intrusive: at Ov. *Am.* III. 13. 1 the word *coniunx* (of the poet's actual wife) operates like a dash of cold water, dramatizing the break with love-elegy and the (ostensible) way of life entailed by it and the new departure into aetiological elegy, of which the poem itself is a sample.

³⁶Coleman (above, note 2), p. 231.

³⁷Leach (above, note 27), p. 154.

³⁸Aristaen. I. 10. 21 M.

on its instantaneous operation;³⁹ and here his witness is borne out by that of Ovid:

Ordine fac referas ut sis mihi cognita primum,
sacra pharetratae dum facit ipsa deae;
ut te conspecta subito, si forte notasti,
restiterim fixis in tua membra genis,
et, te dum nimium miror, nota certa furoris,
deciderint umero pallia lapsa meo. (*Her.* 20. 203-08)

It is possible that the idea of borrowing the motif of *Ecl.* 8. 37-40 from Theocritus' *Idyll* 11 and combining it with the motif of love at first sight from *Idyll* 2 may have been suggested to Virgil by the part played by the latter motif in the Callimachean story.

(4) Connected with this last point is the emphasis on the power of love, Amor, in Damon's song. The words "nunc scio quid sit Amor" (43), "now I know what manner of thing is Love," are based directly on Theocritus (*Id.* 3. 15); but the emphasis and perhaps the borrowing itself may have been suggested by Callimachus. In him Acontius' reactions to the wound dealt him by Love and the poet's own comments (here the fragments, Aristaenetus and Ovid all tell the same tale) combine to stress the power of this arbitrary god to change the course of a man's life.

(5) In Theocritus, Galatea and her mother are picking flowers "on the hill" and Polyphemus shows them the way. In Virgil the meeting takes place "saepibus in nostris," in an enclosed orchard. In Callimachus (Aristaenetus), Acontius first saw Cydippe in the precinct of Artemis and plucked his apple (quince) from the garden of Aphrodite.⁴⁰

(6) When the singer and Nysa first met they were mere children. One French commentator was driven to invoke "southern precocity" to account for the violence of the singer's childish passion.⁴¹ In Theocritus, Polyphemus is an adolescent, "with the down new on his lips and temples"; he has loved Galatea since the encounter on the hillside, but there is nothing in the text to indicate how long ago that took place. Virgil goes out of his way to emphasize that this was indeed child-love: the singer just twelve and Nysa small — *paruam*. And whereas in Theocritus Galatea was accompanied by *Polyphemus'* mother, in Virgil,

³⁹Aristaen. I. 10. 17-20, 24 M.; cf. Callim. fr. 70 Pf. See also K. Kost, ed., *Musaïos Hero und Leander* (Bonn 1971), pp. 273-74 and n. 282.

⁴⁰Aristaen. I. 10. 24-26 M.

⁴¹Guillemin, cit. Richter (above, note 30), p. 51. As Richter comments, "Ce n'est plus l'enfant qui parle, mais l'homme."

though the words "cum matre" are ambiguous, no doubt intentionally so, to avoid making the change from the model inartistically obvious, they most naturally mean, and are generally taken to mean, "with *your* mother." This too squares with Callimachus, where Acontius is still a pretty boy, not a hobbledohoy, and Cydippe is called small, ὀλίγην,⁴² of which *paruam* is a literal rendering. We do not learn from Callimachus (Aristaenetus) that Cydippe was with her mother when she visited the sanctuary where Acontius saw her, but this detail is in Ovid's adaptation of the story.⁴³

(7) The two songs of *Eclogue* 8 both correspond and contrast with each other. Damon's song ends with an invocation of chaos and a threat of suicide, Alphesiboeus' with the return of Delphis from the city. To the "happy ending" of *Eclogue* 8 there is no counterpart in either the second or the eleventh *Idylls* of Theocritus, both of which close on a note of frustrated longing. It is a fair guess that the happy ending may have been imported from the Acontius story.

No single item in this list, which is not exhaustive, is cogent taken in isolation, and some are admittedly speculative. All together they seem to me to lend weight to the likelihood — to put it no more strongly — that Virgil had Callimachus very much in his mind when he wrote the eighth *Eclogue*, even more than when he wrote the second. In making this suggestion I am not of course seeking to imply that it amounts to an explanation of why the poems are what they are. The transformation which Virgil wrought in the ideas and materials which he took from earlier poetry remains unforeseeable and individual to him. Critics have sensed that in Corydon there is much of Virgil himself;⁴⁴ and the beauty and intensity of the two complementary vignettes around which the songs of the eighth *Eclogue* are constructed may seem to some to authorize a similar inference. That is as it may be. It is notoriously fallacious to read the biography of a poet from his poetry. Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper" reads, and was meant to read, as the echo of a real experience intensely endured. We happen to know that the idea which lends the poem its special poignancy, the plaintive song of the girl as she worked alone — that this idea came out of a book.⁴⁵ What emerged from the interaction between first- and second-hand experience was a work of art that transcends and is indeed irrelevant to

⁴²Callim. fr. 67. 9 Pf.

⁴³Ov. *Her.* 21. 87-96.

⁴⁴Cf. Richter (above, note 30), p. 19; O. Skutsch, "Symmetry and sense in the *Eclogues*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 73 (1968), p. 160.

⁴⁵J. Beer, *Wordsworth and the human heart* (New York 1978), pp. 134-35.

its origins. "The voice of a single girl, singing in a field, has become eloquent of the resources of a common humanity and shared emotion which, while her song lasts, are known to be possessed fundamentally by every member of the human race."⁴⁶

"While her song lasts..."; and the songs of Corydon, of Damon, of Alpheisiboeus. They have lasted for two thousand years; and in commemorating them we also commemorate the other poets, Greek and Roman, who stirred Virgil's imagination and set it to work on its unpredictable course. Theocritus still appeals strongly to us in his own right — but Callimachus? In spite of all the admirable work on him that has been done and is still being done by Clausen and others, his influence on Latin poetry from Catullus onwards — its extent and its strength — remains to me an unexpected and slightly mystifying phenomenon. The fact of it cannot be disputed. In this study I have tried to isolate and illustrate Virgil's response to one of the stories in the *Aetia* about which we chance to be relatively well informed, against the background of its reception and adaptation by three of his contemporaries, Gallus, Propertius and Ovid. Three of the four seized on the one element in Callimachus' treatment which had obvious pathetic value, his retreat to the wilderness and his unhappy soliloquy there. The odd man out was Ovid, who (as I have argued elsewhere⁴⁷) addressed himself to the possibilities which Callimachus had *not* exploited and so gave the story a totally new complexion. This he did by jettisoning Callimachus' characterization of Acontius as *καλός παῖς*, *formosus puer*, and making a man of him; and by creating *ex nihilo* a character for Cydippe, who in the original is a puppet. The motif exploited by the other three poets he did not entirely discard, for the whole of *Heroides* 20, the epistle of Acontius, is in effect a much expanded version, though in a different (unspecified) setting, of Acontius' original expostulation to the trees. The idea of alienation from nature he left severely alone; what Virgil did with it in the second *Eclogue* I have tried, briefly and inadequately, to indicate.

Those who read the *Aeneid* in a correctly punctuated text know that Virgil did not make Aeneas offer (still less offer himself) the words "sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt" as a comment on the human condition.⁴⁸ Nevertheless those who persist in quoting the verse out of context, as in spite of the objections of pedants they will,

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴⁷Kenney (above, note 9), pp. 391, 404-05; "Two Disputed Passages in the *Heroides*," *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 29 (1979), pp. 425-28.

⁴⁸Cf. "Two Footnotes," *Classical Review* n.s. 14 (1964), p. 13.

re intuitively and essentially justified. Virgil's sensibility to suffering is something peculiar to him, and it is why the *Aeneid* is an epic like no other that was ever written. As Clausen observes, in the reflected lustre of the *Aeneid* the young poet is very hard to see;⁴⁹ but the same sense of overpowering isolation experienced by the reader of Corydon's complaint is there unmistakably in the character of Aeneas.⁵⁰ Beside the nature agonies of Dido and Aeneas, set against a background of the rise and fall of dynasties and empires, the songs of the *Eclogues*, in their settings of conventional elegiac and pastoral motifs and written in hexameter distinguished by mannerisms which had no place in the more austere epic tradition, are apt to tempt the unsympathetic critic to dismiss them as artificial. So they are, but they are not therefore false: the sensibility is the same, something that we call Virgilian because there is no other word for it:

tale tuum carmen nobis, diuine poeta,
quale sopor fessis in gramine, quale per aestum
dulcis aquae saliente sitim restinguere riuo. (*Ecl.* 5. 45-47)

After two thousand years the song lasts; the spring still flows; Delphi has long been given up to the archaeologist and the tourist; of this oracle the speaking water has not been quenched.

Peterhouse, Cambridge

⁴⁹W. Clausen in E. J. Kenney and W. Clausen, edd., *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature II. Latin literature* (Cambridge 1982), p. 306.

⁵⁰G. Lieberg, "Vergils Aeneis als Dichtung der Einsamkeit," in H. Bardon and R. Verdière, edd., *Vergiliana: recherches sur Virgile* (Leiden 1971), pp. 175-91.